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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 001332

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/01/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: US OPPOSITION TO ANTI-CONVERSION BILL HEADLINES
FRONT PAGE OF LOCAL PAPER

REF: A. COLOMBO 1169

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 1229

[1](#)C. STATE 131741

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD FOR REASONS 1.4(b) and (d)
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[1](#)1. (U) On July 31 a Sunday Times newspaper's front-page headline read "US warns Lanka on religious bill." The article, which listed no author or sources, cited Christine Rocca's meeting with Sri Lankan Ambassador to the US Bernard Gunatilleke. It purported that Rocca warned that if the Sri Lankan parliament passed an anti-conversion bill, the action could have adverse consequences on US aid and trade concessions to Sri Lanka. The article continued that the Ambassador had been "given assurances at the highest level" that the bill would not be passed.

COMMENT

[1](#)2. (C) On July 14, President Kumaratunga had privately assured the Ambassador that the bill would not move forward in parliament (Reftel B). The President and Foreign Minister Kardigamar had said that it would be best if the US and other outside parties kept a low public profile on the issue. The Sunday Times article was not helpful in that regard.

[1](#)3. (C) The article did not cite the date of Rocca's meeting with Gunatilleke, which occurred July 6. The Sri Lankan Embassy in Washington DC assured pressoff that they had not released news about the meeting.
LUNSTEAD